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SUBJECT: PRIMER ON THE 2009 INDONESIAN ELECTIONS

REF: JAKARTA 154 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Indonesia is gearing up for its national legislative elections in April. Parties winning the most votes in the legislative elections will be well poised to field candidates in the July presidential election. Indonesians are working hard to ensure the smooth running of this series of elections. That said, with complex rules, various court challenges and over 170 million people slated to vote in this, the world's third largest democracy, there could be hiccups and delays. The USG is providing targeted electoral assistance, including for political party training and technical support. END SUMMARY.

POLITICAL PLAYING FIELD

12. (SBU) Indonesian eyes are increasingly focused on the national legislative ("DPR") elections in April. There are 38 parties contesting the elections. (Note: Additional local parties will contest in Aceh, which operates under a separate electoral regime due to the peace accord there.) A total of 11,000 candidates will compete for the 560 legislative seats. Seventeen parties currently hold seats in Parliament. However, with the new requirement that every party receive 2.5% of the national vote or more in order to get a seat in the DPR, the number of parties that will make it to Parliament is likely to decrease.

13. (SBU) While there are new parties, the main contenders remain the same. Only nine are considered significant players. Golkar (VP Yusuf Kalla's party) and the Indonesian Party of Democratic Struggle (PDI-P--Megawati Sukarnoputri's opposition party) are the historical heavyweights. In recent polls, however, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's Partai Demokrat (PD) has surged to the lead. The party that wins a plurality of seats will be in a strong position in the next Parliament in terms of controlling key committee assignments and other key positions.

14. (SBU) There are four major Muslim-oriented parties: the National Mandate Party (PAN); the United Development Party (PPP); the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS); and, the National Awakening Party (PKB). Of these parties, PKS is expected to be the strongest.

15. (C) Finally, two other parties of note are led by retired generals, Gerindra (led by Prabowo Subianto) and Hanura (led by Wiranto--one name only). Both Prabowo and Wiranto are stigmatized by past human rights violations. At this point, Gerindra seems the more formidable and well-financed of the two parties.

OTHER ELECTIONS IN APRIL

16. (U) In addition to the national legislative elections, voters will get three other ballots on April 9 in order to elect:

---The Regional Representative Council (DPD), the national

Parliament's Upper House (132 seats);
---Provincial People's Representative Councils (DPRD
Provinsi) (35-100 each); and,
---Regency/City Regional People's Representative Councils
(DPRD Kabupaten/Kota) (20-50 each).

Ballots will consist of party symbols and the parties' candidate lists. During this election, voters must choose either candidates or parties, not both. All candidates, except those for the DPD, must be affiliated with political parties.

NOTES ON INDONESIA'S ELECTORAL SYSTEM

¶7. (U) Indonesia's electoral system is a proportional representation system. The larger an area is by population, the more seats apportioned to it. The GOI divides the number of valid votes by the number of seats in a respective district to estimate the number of votes it will take for a party to be awarded seats. It then allocates seats to each party in proportion to the number of votes each receives in that district.

¶8. (U) Previously, parties created ranked lists of candidates and allocated the seats received to the candidates highest on its list. This allowed the party elite to decide which candidates actually received seats. Indonesia's Constitutional Court recently mandated that candidates who receive the most votes should be awarded seats.

¶9. (U) There will be an estimated 480,000 polling booths operating on election day, Thursday, April 9. Over 170 million Indonesians are expected to vote (anyone 17 or over can vote if registered). Though "quick counts" will emerge much earlier, election results for the national DPR and the regional DPD seats will only be officially announced 30 days after the elections. Local and provincial counts will be announced 12-15 days after the election. The new DPR members will take their seats on October 20.

LOOKING TOWARD THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

¶10. (U) The legislative elections influence the presidential election process. New regulations will narrow the field of presidential candidates for the July 8 election. Presidential candidates must be nominated by political parties. Parties must now win 25 percent of the national vote or 20 percent of the DPR seats in order to field a presidential candidate. Consequently, most observers predict that Indonesia will have only three to four pairs of presidential/vice-presidential candidates going into the first round of presidential elections. President Yudhoyono and PDIP chief and former president Megawati are widely expected to be two of the candidates.

¶11. (U) If no candidate gets more than 50% of the vote in the July 8 election, a second presidential election round will be held between the top two candidates. That round is slated to take place on September 8 before the important Muslim Eid Ul Fitri holiday. The next president will be inaugurated on October 20.

SOME FLUX EXPECTED

¶12. (SBU) Indonesians are already experienced in elections. They held successful legislative and direct presidential elections in 2004, and have held hundreds of gubernatorial and other races in recent years. Over all, their record is excellent, though there occasionally have been problems and, very irregularly, low-level tensions that spill out to the streets. The USG is providing targeted electoral assistance, including for political party training and technical support.

¶13. (C) Given the Indonesian system's complex rules, various court challenges and the over 170 million people slated to vote in this, the world's third largest democracy, there could be hiccups and delays. Some observers believe, for example, that the legislative elections could be postponed

due to problems with voter registration, the vote casting mechanism and other issues. In addition, there are indications that the Constitutional Court could make rulings that dramatically re-interpret electoral rules. All that said, odds are strongly in favor of the continued success of Indonesia's democratic electoral system.

HUME